



**ROMA PEOPLE, STREET WORK  
AND EUROPEAN POLICIES**



*Eric Roset photographer*

*In collaboration with*



*This activity is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013)*

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## BACKGROUND

Despite the fact that Roma people are one of the main minority groups in Europe, with a relevant presence in all Member states of the EU, the lack of knowledge and consistency in the field of Roma is still a key issue to be addressed.

With this objective in mind, over the past two years street workers from about fifteen countries have been working together on studying the Roma issue based on their practical experience. On 16 October 2012, the lessons learnt were presented at the Dynamo International Street Workers Network's conference on "**Roma, street work and European policies**", held at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The event is part of a discussion on the national strategies for Roma integration, in compliance with the Commission's recent policy recommendations for the implementation of the EU's Framework for Roma integration up to 2020.

During the debate on **16 October**, a fruitful discussion took place, in the presence of excellent speakers and participants from all walks of life and all backgrounds. Experts and grassroots workers had the opportunity to share their opinions and compare political perspectives with practices in the field. **Two documentaries** were shown in order to fuel discussion:

The first, "**De Charybde en Scylla**", shows the journey of Bernard De Vos, the General Delegate of the French Community for the Rights of the Child (DGDE), to Serbia, following the footsteps of a Roma family (two adults and 5 children, the youngest of whom was born in Brussels) who left Place Gaucheret in Schaerbeek for Belgrade. On their return to Serbia, the eldest child, aged eleven and with multiple disabilities, dies due to a lack of appropriate care. Using a specific case, this film illustrates the discriminations the Roma, starting with the children, are victims of, both here and there.

The second, "**Percorsi di cambiamento abitativo di Rom e Sinti**", deals with this very delicate issue of Roma housing in Europe. It has been produced as part of the Transition project, the result of an initiative supported by Dynamo International, and subsidised by the European Union's Progress programme. Partners from the Italian, Greek and Romanian platforms of the International Network of Street Social Workers have analysed the housing problems encountered by the Roma in each partner country.

The testimonies gathered in this film and during the meetings organised as part of the Transition project echo the experience of the Roma in Serbia: families are evicted from the area in which they have been living insecurely, perhaps for over 20 years, and they are barely given a few days' notice; the relocation confines them to isolated places, in the outskirts, and often in inappropriate places, with degrading overcrowding conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> **Partners involved in the project:** Dynamo International Street Workers Network ([www.socialstreetwork.org](http://www.socialstreetwork.org)), Centro Accoglienza La Rupe, Italy ([www.cooprube.it](http://www.cooprube.it)); ARSIS – Association for the Social Support of Youth, Greece ([www.arsis.gr](http://www.arsis.gr)); European Alternatives, Romania ([www.euroalter.com](http://www.euroalter.com))



## DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL'S POSITION ON ROMA INTEGRATION

### Introductory remarks

The International Street Workers Network of Dynamo International firmly believe that the Roma issue is a major challenge for the EU. The inhumane living conditions and the exclusion experienced by people of Roma origin are clear evidence that segregation is not just a word but a recurring practice across Europe.

Dynamo International and its members insist on the **importance of not pushing the Roma people "to the sidelines", but to make them people "in their own right"**.

The general perception we have of the Roma is mistaken. We perceive them to be nomadic, and this is far from always being the case. Often, they do not choose to move, but rather they are made to move.

As part of their daily work, street workers do not try to assimilate, integrate or bring the Roma to something that would supposedly be better for them (along the lines of modern colonialism) but to give them assistance in all helpful and necessary procedures, better knowledge of their rights, the tools to understand their situation and speak for themselves by themselves.

**Street workers are often the only people to be in direct contact with the Roma community. In some cases, they are the first and last link in the chain of education and social assistance.** They must not take the place of institutions, in spite of their deficiencies, they must remain intermediaries.

The job of street workers involves providing a listening ear and support, which brings with it varying demands, different ways of searching for solutions according to the needs of the people in specific situations, with their own individual backgrounds and needs. It is precisely these specificities that must be taken into consideration. With regards to housing, for example, it is essential to involve these populations in the process.

**Ghettoisation is, in any case, not the solution the Roma want: just as they value their culture and family-based organisation, they also value being a part of society and living amongst others.**

Housing policies are, in reality, often social isolation policies in the majority of European States. In spite of the standards in place, the Member States' commitment to combating discrimination would appear to be inefficient. Furthermore, the Roma do not seem to be aware of the provisions in force that concern them.

Too often, public opinion, politicians and the media contribute to conveying a negative, stereotyped and superficial image of the Roma, their customs and their culture, labelling them as "eternal scapegoats": choosing to live in poverty (poverty as cultural characteristic), being criminals (genetic or cultural explanations occasionally put forward), being parasites (lazy by nature) and being nomadic. However, poverty, exclusion and discrimination are all daily realities for the Roma who, sometimes, have no other choice than to develop survival strategies. These strategies are therefore not cultural characteristics. Far from being aware of this fact, and riding a populist wave, for many it would be good form if these people could keep as low a profile as possible.

If we manage to break down negative stereotypes (they do not respect the law, they do not want to integrate, etc.), joint consideration and discussion becomes possible. Street workers, political leaders and, in particular, the Roma populations must work together in order to tackle the social, ethical, legal and political challenges. Together they will be able, insofar as possible, to make a difference.



## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Against the above background, the International Street Workers Network of Dynamo International put forward the following recommendations to policy and decision makers at all level:

### 🌀 Improvement of data collection systems

Despite recent positive developments in this field, EU and national governments lack a thorough assessment of the current situation and actual needs of Roma populations across EU. That leads to an **inadequate identification of the problems and flawed strategies** on Roma. This has been a constant problem for previous integration strategies, whether national or European.

**We therefore urge EU decision makers to prioritise the issue of data collection and allot more resources to the consistent research on Roma, both qualitative and quantitative. The EU shall support a network on Roma studies to better link research and policy. Member states have to develop appropriate tools and methods for evaluation as a prerequisite for designing evidence based policies for Roma inclusion.**

As it is the case, decision makers draft their strategies taking into account “the statistical” Roma. Such an approach is the road to failure, not in the least because of sometimes minimal or flawed data and the ignoring of the extreme heterogeneity of Roma communities. This heterogeneity means that there cannot be a single strategy: rather there is a need for differentiated approaches that are sensitive to geographical, economic, social, cultural and legal contexts. Furthermore, the diversity of Roma needs to be properly documented starting with the local level, because the key to integration is often local. Then, these solutions need to be connected to the general framework of policies on education, employment, public health or urban rehabilitation.

However, any such approach begins with the collection of data. We recommend EU institutions to ask member states to collect ethnically disaggregated data, so that policies on health, education, housing, employment, income reflects at least the real statistical situation. We are aware of the fact that for some member states this poses serious problems, because in such cases statistical systems reflect a particular definition of the nation.

### 🌀 Mainstreaming and desegregation: a balanced approach to exclusive policies for the Roma.

In most of the national strategies submitted to the Commission, inclusion policies are tailored to the needs of population segments/groups in difficult socio-economic circumstances. This approach often obscures the role and consequences of systematic and institutionalised anti-gypsyism and discrimination in general.

**We recommend that legal initiatives should adopt an approach of explicit but not exclusive focusing on Roma, an approach that should not separate Roma-focused interventions from mainstream policy initiatives but should recognise that the nature of exclusion is not merely economic, and the means to overcome it are not restricted to that.**

There are several factors peculiar to many Roma communities that recommend a positive action approach:

- Historically partially on entirely segregated education or housing patterns
- Vulnerability to long term unemployment



- The lack of documents proving land ownership or the lack of ID documents

Improvements with regard to the enrolment of Roma children in mainstream (early childhood education and care) schools might require in many cases providing extra resources to individual schools, changing the admission procedures, the boundaries of school districts, and the provision of stable housing, public transport or the issuing of ID documents.

However, this approach should take into consideration the shortcomings already revealed by practice: the development of artificial and separate "Roma" labour markets created by temporary projects, separate classrooms or schools for Roma children or separate housing areas. To avoid such outcomes, policies should be tailored in depth to specific needs of strictly localised communities. This requires more efforts and interest on part of local authorities but also more coordinated and professional research at regional level.

Additionally, some aspects seldom ignored by public policy interventions need to be properly addressed: the different features of the urban or rural context in which the Roma reside and the fact that across some Roma communities, women and children are exposed to particularly high risks.

#### 🌀 Inter-cultural approach and fighting anti-gypsyism

**We recommend public authorities at any level to increase their efforts to bring about an acceptance of the Roma in the media, schools and other areas of public life, toughen the laws relating to racism, and set up effective implementation procedures.**

Separate but equal has too often been the mask of deep exclusion and second-class citizenship. With all the legislation addressing the issues of Roma, the separate but equal spectre is very likely to become a reality if EU and national institutions do not address convincingly anti-gypsyism and the latent racism against Roma. In many formal contexts, anti-gypsyism is not even acknowledged because it has been traditionally the socially accepted model of interacting with Roma.

#### 🌀 Ensuring Roma participation in the drafting process and implementation

**The EU and member states should ensure more consultation and participation of Roma and Roma organisations, both in the drafting phase and implementation of projects that directly affect them.**

This requires adequate and efficient procedures to organize participation but also constant over viewing and monitoring on how the point of view of Roma is taken into account in policy making and implementation.

#### 🌀 Responsible responses to the migration of Roma

Because of the freedom of movement inside EU, many Western societies have welcomed the brain-drain and the cheap labour force from CEE. The same attitude was refused to the vast majority of migrants of Roma origin. Often, the sole policy about Roma migrants has been expulsion. In many cases, expulsion interrupts any kind of integration in the host country without generating it in the origin country. Those who are expelled most often return and the process starts again.

**We therefore recommend that the Roma should be integrated where they choose to live. We believe that EU and member states should not only address and protect the human rights of Roma migrants, (including their rights to education and decent healthcare) but rather take a positive interpretation of fundamental rights. This means the setting of inclusion strategies for Roma migrants and the stopping of expulsion policies.**



- ⊗ **Realistic targets and timelines, proper monitoring instruments, constant measures to reinforce reforms**

**EU should require from member states the explicit definitions of institutional responsibilities and accountability so that to ensure the ownership of the integration strategies and respective policies by all the relevant government departments.**

This requires a precise joint working methodology for different responsible institutions and stakeholders, a coherent planning of adequate and sufficient funding (clear budget lines to ensure the implementation of each indicator, including at the regional and local levels) and a set of sanctions EU can apply to regions and countries that are not meeting targets for the Roma.

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**About Dynamo International**

**Dynamo International** coordinates the **International Street Workers Network**, composed of 48 national platforms from Southern and Northern countries. The Network support street work in each country to generate international solidarity between key stakeholders and promote equality, empowerment and human rights for **people living in street situation**. Acknowledged as a European network fighting against poverty, it is supported by the **EU Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013)**

